

VZCZCXYZ0001  
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHZP #0715/01 1231619  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
R 031619Z MAY 07  
FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0293  
INFO RHMFISS/CDR USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC  
RHMFISS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC  
RUEKJCS/OSD WASHDC  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L PANAMA 000715

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/03/2017  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PM](#)  
SUBJECT: PANAMA: TWO PRD WOMEN ACTIVISTS SHARE VIEWS

Classified By: POLCOUNS BRIAN R. NARANJO. REASONS: 1.4 (B) AND (D)

-----  
Summary  
-----

¶1. (C) Panamanian President Martin Torrijos "is a completely different person these days," de facto PRD women's group secretary Maribel Coco told POLREP on April 27. "Before winning election, he had close contact with the party structures, but now he ignores them." According to PRD women's activist Irasema Rosas de Ahumada, Torrijos would postpone the PRD's internal elections until February 2008. Neither Coco nor De Ahumada were confident that Minister of Housing (MIVI) Balbina Herrera could defeat former President Ernesto "El Toro" Perez Balladares for the PRD Presidency. Furthermore, both were highly critical of Balbina's support for women within the PRD. De Ahumada shared some insights into the race between First VP and FM Samuel Lewis and Panama City Mayor Juan Carlos Navarro (who are first cousins) to secure the PRD nomination to succeed Torrijos as President. End Summary.

-----  
Aloof Torrijos to Postpone PRD Internal Elections  
-----

¶2. (C) Coco and De Ahumada noted that Torrijos would push the PRD internal elections into next year, possibly February 2008, confirming what post had heard from multiple sources. Both were also highly critical of Torrijos' leadership, particularly of the PRD. (Note: Torrijos, in addition to being President of the republic, is also Secretary General of the PRD.) "He is a completely different person these days. Before winning election, he had close contact with the party structures, but now he ignores them," Coco asserted. De Ahumada claimed that Torrijos had decided to postpone the PRD's internal elections for three reasons:

-- Torrijos did not control the PRD's National Directive Committee (CDN), the operational board of directors of the party.  
-- Torrijos wished to forestall the departure of PRD elected officials and functionaries for the campaign trail. Instead, Torrijos wanted to keep these PRD officials on the job and focused on implementing his administration's initiatives. An earlier initiation of the campaign season would limit the government's ability to get things done and would thereby damage the images of Torrijos and Lewis, Torrijos' choice to succeed himself. Torrijos and Lewis "need to continue inaugurating new projects to score points with the public,"

De Ahumada explained.

-- Torrijos did not care about the PRD any more and was counting the days until he could enjoy his wealth.

-----  
Can Balbina Defeat El Toro?  
-----

13. (C) Neither PRD activist was confident that current Minister of Housing (MIVI) Balbina Herrera could defeat former President Ernesto "El Toro" Perez Balladares in the race for President of the PRD. "We will only know after the votes are counted," Coco said. Focusing on women's issues, Coco added, "Balbina has done nothing to support the PRD's women's agenda, and many women leaders in the party have already voiced their disagreement with her candidacy for party president." For example, Coco said that she had organized a March event to celebrate International Women's Day that was attended by 1,200 women. Coco requested the support of the PRD's National Executive Committee (CEN); "Torrijos gave us nothing. Balbina gave us nothing. (Panama City Mayor and aspirant for the PRD presidential nomination) Juan Carlos Navarro paid for the snacks and drinks. (Water and Sanitation Director and candidate for PRD President) Juan Jose Amado paid for the mariachis. El Toro surprised us all by sending 1,200 red roses -- each with a message for each lady -- he is so smart!"

-----  
Insight into the Battle of the Cousins  
-----

14. (C) De Ahumada noted that her family was divided on whether to support First VP and FM Samuel Lewis Navarro or Panama City Mayor Juan Carlos Navarro for the PRD's nomination to be president of the republic. These first cousins were viewed as the leading PRD options to succeed Torrijos. "I support Lewis because Navarro is a crook," De Ahumada said, "but my husband and two sons support Navarro." Asserting that she frequently discussed Lewis' political future with her brother-in-law and Lewis' closest MFA Senior Advisor Adolfo Ahumada, she added, "Lewis should depart the MFA soon and distance himself from Torrijos, but Adolfo does not agree. My brother-in-law does not see that Lewis has become Torrijos' shadow and that image will sink Lewis."

-----  
Bio Notes  
-----

15. (C) Maribel Coco is the Director of Senior Adult Affairs at the Ministry of Social Development (MIDES) and the de facto PRD women's group secretary. She unsuccessfully ran for the National Assembly in 2004, but will run again this time against former National Maritime Service (SMN) Director Ricardo Traad. "I can beat Traad easily," Coco bragged. "He is too tied to (the) Rayo Montano (international drug trafficking case), and I will remind voters of that."

16. (C) Irasema Rosas de Ahumada is the President of the National Forum of Women in Political Parties. Presently, she is the director of "Mi Pueblito," a Panama City outdoor cultural park; De Ahumada was appointed by Navarro. One of her sons is an assistant to National Assembly President Elias Castillo, and the other son is a PRD precinct captain. She is the sister-in-law to Adolfo Ahumada, Lewis' closest advisor at the MFA and a member of the board of the Panama Canal Authority (ACP).

-----  
Comment  
-----

17. (C) Coco's and De Ahumada's comments provide a better understanding of the to and fro within the PRD rank and file, though post does not assess their analysis to be definitive. Coco and De Ahumada confirm for post yet again that: Torrijos is widely perceived by PRD rank and file to be

remote; the PRD's internal elections will be postponed to early 2008; the race for PRD president will be between Balbina and El Toro; and the race for the PRD nomination to be president of the republic will be between Lewis and Navarro.

EATON